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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK WEEKLY POL/ECON REPORT - November 02, 2007

11. The following are brief items of interest compiled by Embassy Minsk.

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Civil Society

12. Activists Mark Remembrance Day

Hundreds of opposition youth and civil society activists marched October 28 to the Kurapaty Stalin-era execution site to hold a sanctioned demonstration marking Ancestors' Remembrance Day. The demonstrators displayed nationalist white-red-white flags, Malady Front banners, and signs calling for the release of political prisoners Dmitry Dashkevich and Aleksandr Kozulin. Police vehicles and plainclothesmen escorted and filmed the crowd on the way to Kurapaty without interfering. Over 1,500 people gathered at the site, prayed and dedicated a restored wooden cross that was vandalized a few days before the commemoration. In Gomel, over 50 opposition activists also marked the day by staging an unauthorized picket at a local execution site where they unveiled a memorial stone to the martyrs of Belarus. Police closely monitored and filmed the event, but did not interfere. In a separate incident, police prevented opposition activists from traveling to the Grodno region October 27 to commemorate the memory of prominent Belarusian independence fighters Kastus and Viktor Kalinovsky. Police twice detained activists for over four hours for allegedly speeding, transporting illegal immigrants, and smuggling alcohol. Running

short of time, the group returned to Minsk.

13. Police Seize Materials Ahead of Social March

Police seized 5,000 leaflets and stickers October 30 publicizing the Social March scheduled for November 4. Officers apprehended Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) member Vatslav Oreshko at a bus stop in central Minsk and detained him for three hours. Oreshko said the officers guaranteed the return of materials after a check, but he expressed doubt the materials would be returned before November 4, asserting that police plan to prevent dissemination of Social March information.

14. Opposition Youth Examined by Psychiatrists

Youth activist Andrey Tenyuta, facing criminal charges for allegedly acting on behalf of the unregistered organization Malady Front (MF), underwent a BKGB-mandated psychiatric examination at a Gomel clinic October 25. Tenyuta spent eight hours at the hospital, and in addition to the examination doctors inquired about his MF activities. Test results will be released later. The BKGB refused to return his computer and printed materials seized during a raid on his apartment in early October.

15. Authorities Ban Commemoration of Afghan War Victims

October 31, Minsk city authorities denied permission to stage a commemoration ceremony at a memorial to Soviet soldiers killed in Afghanistan. Ceremony organizers, the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and National Public Association of Afghanistan War Disabled Veterans, intended to commemorate the occasion during an anti-Communist forum to be held on November 3 at BPF headquarters. They also planned to protest the upcoming International Communists Conference and memorialize those who died in "the USSR's drive for world domination." City authorities claimed the organizers violated

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the law governing procedures for mass events.

16. Political Prisoners Facing New Criminal Charges

Opposition youth group Malady Front (MF) leader Artur Finkevich, currently serving a two-year khimiya sentence in Mogilev now faces new criminal charges over unspecified violations of the terms of his sentence. Finkevich, due to be released in mid-December, may now be sentenced to up to three more years in jail. The new charges were brought following Finkevich's fourth warning from the administration. In a separate case, closed door hearings against political prisoner Dmitry Dashkevich will take place November 6 in the prison where he is currently held. Authorities opened a new case against Dashkevich August 14, charging him of refusing to testify as a witness in a criminal case against MF member Ivan Shilo. The charges carry a penalty of up to three years in jail.

17. Several Activists Receive Fines

A Brest district judge October 30 fined opposition activist Roman Kislyak 62,000 rubles (USD 29) on petty hooliganism charges. Police briefly detained him after stopping Kislyak's car October 13 claiming he was engaged in a hit and run. He was released October 15 and charged with using obscenities in police officers' presence. In a separate case, "For Freedom" movement activist Igor Lyalkov received a fine of 930,000 rubles (USD 430) for organizing "a mass event of an opposition nature" August 11. Lyalkov received the ruling October 29 which cited his refusal to sign a document acknowledging charges against him and failure to appear at his October 10 court hearing. The activist argued he did not receive a subpoena and will appeal the fine to a higher court.

18. Market Vendors Barred from Protesting

Police detained small business leader Sergey Parsyukevich and local opposition activist Anatoly Shapovalov October 29 for an hour on suspicion of car theft. Police officers stopped the demonstration organizers as they were driving to a market vendors rally in Vitebsk. Police stopped another opposition member, Kristofor

Zhelyapov, while he was driving from Minsk to Vitebsk, but released him shortly thereafter without charges. Shapovalov walked to the venue and informed about 20 market vendors already gathered at the site that they should disperse as the authorities banned the rally. This was the second denial of market vendors' applications to stage protests.

Domestic Economy

¶9. Ministry Reports Stable Budget Implementation

Belarus' Finance Ministry announced October 29 that the country met national budget revenue targets for January-September, although with some difficulties. VAT, profit and excise tax revenues were higher than expected. Social expenditures including healthcare, sports, culture, education, and welfare exceeded USD 4.6 billion, or 43.1 percent of all expenditures. Finance Minister Nikolai Korbut stressed the importance of tight control of targeted spending, saving, and repayment of state loans.

¶10. Ruble Down 4.6 Percent

The National Bank of Belarus announced October 30 that the Belarusian Ruble depreciated 4.6 percent in real terms during the January-September time period. The Belarusian ruble depreciated 5.9 percent against the Russian ruble, 1.8 percent against the euro, 3.7 percent against the Ukrainian hryvna and appreciated 1.6 percent against the dollar.

International Trade

¶11. Foreign Investment, Trade Deficit Rise

Belarus' Vice Premier Andrey Kobaykov announced October 26 that foreign investment in Belarus totaled USD 2.3 billion for the January-June time period, a 100 percent year-on-year increase. Through August 2007 imports rose 24.8 percent while exports were up 18.3 percent. He reported a commodity trade deficit of USD 2.07 billion and a services trade surplus of USD 761 million. Kobaykov cited higher energy costs and increased imports of non-food consumer goods as the main reason for the deficit.

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equipment to Belarus' future nuclear power plant. Under an agreement with Russia's Export-Import Bank signed in May 2007, Belarus was offered exceptionally favorable conditions to import Russian-made equipment. [Note: The GOB continues to explore several options, including Russian, European and American suppliers for this project. End note.]

¶13. Quote of the Week

Leonid Kovalyov, leader of the state-sponsored BRSM Belarusian Republican Youth Union, espousing the government line on the Malady Front:

"I don't particularly have anything against Malady Front. I just don't understand how people who work to destabilize the country can say that they care about youth. Let Malady Front prove through their actions that they are capable of doing something useful for youth."

Stewart